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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 16 December 1998, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. SOMAVÍA (Chile)

CONTENTS

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued)

Theme for the high-level meeting of the operational activities segment of the substantive session of 1999

Distribution of seats on the Executive Board of the World Food Programme

Participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women

Elections, appointments and confirmations

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS 50/227 AND 52/12 B

SOCIAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (continued) (E/1998/99; E/1998/L.52)

Theme for the high-level meeting of the operational activities segment of the substantive session of 1999

The PRESIDENT said he took it that the Council wished to adopt draft decision I as it appeared in document E/1998/L.52.

It was so decided.

Distribution of seats on the Executive Board of the World Food Programme

Mr. NEBENZIA (Russian Federation), introducing draft resolution E/1998/L.51 on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, recalled paragraph 25 of General Assembly resolution 48/162 and noted that, at the end of the restructuring process, some regions had fewer representatives on certain bodies than they had had at the beginning of the process. That was normal if the total number of seats had been reduced. The Group of Eastern European States had been allocated only two seats on the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes (the predecessor of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme (WFP)) when its membership was only eight countries; that was logical. However, when its membership had tripled, it still had only two seats, an anomaly that resolution 48/162 had tried to correct by allocating the Group four seats on the Executive Boards of the funds and programmes. Moreover, paragraph 30 of resolution 48/162 stated that "the same arrangements should apply to the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes" and that, to that end, "consultations between the United Nations and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations should be undertaken". Those consultations had resulted in the adoption of General Assembly resolution 50/8, which allocated only two seats to the Group of Eastern European States. However, that decision was not final. Paragraph 3 of the resolution stipulated that the distribution of seats should be reviewed with a view to achieving a specific goal, namely, ensuring that the final membership of the Executive Board was in accordance with paragraphs 25 and 30 and other relevant provisions of General

Assembly resolution 48/162. There was also a specific deadline in that the results were expected to enter into force on 1 January 2000.

Throughout 1998, consultations presided over by the Chairman of the New York working group had been held among the regional groups in order to seek a compromise, in coordination with their partners in Rome. After several unsatisfactory proposals had been rejected, the Group of Eastern European States had made a major concession and had agreed to occupy only one seat, instead of two, and had requested that the matter should be reviewed again in accordance with paragraph 3 of General Assembly resolution 50/8. That request had not been motivated by the mere desire to have the issue re-considered but by the wish to ensure that the principle set out in paragraph 3 was implemented. However, despite the flexibility and spirit of compromise demonstrated by the Group, it had not been possible to reach agreement. In submitting draft resolution E/1998/L.51 the Group of Eastern European States was making a fresh attempt to find a compromise. The text had been prepared on the basis of suggestions from the Chairman of the New York working group and various other groups of countries. It had been suggested by some that the text was a completely new proposal which jeopardized the chances of the adoption of the previous draft resolution at a time when agreement was imminent. In fact, the negotiations could not have been concluded so quickly and the Rome partners were not prepared to endorse the previous version of the draft resolution. The Group was submitting the current draft resolution to ensure that the Council, the Chairman of the New York working group, and all those who had invested their time and energy in that undertaking, would not have wasted a year of efforts. It attempted to reconcile the concerns of all the groups of States while reflecting the principle adopted by the Group of Eastern European States, namely, that a compromise solution could not ignore the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions 48/162 and 50/8. The Group of Eastern European States urged its partners to consider the draft resolution with them and it hoped that an agreement would be reached before organizational session for 1999 of the Economic and Social Council was held.

Ms. DUDA (Poland), explaining the particular reasons why her delegation supported the position put forward by the delegation of the Russian Federation on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States, said that Poland, as a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and a

country which was preparing for membership in the European Union, had committed itself to supporting the efforts of developing countries by contributing as much as it could to international development aid mechanisms. It intended, in particular, to participate more in the World Food Programme and planned to make a voluntary contribution to the Programme in 1999. However, her delegation believed that a rejection of the decisions taken under General Assembly resolutions 48/162 and 50/8 would be unacceptable and could force her Government to reconsider its decision to make a voluntary contribution to WFP.

The PRESIDENT said he took it that the Council wished to adopt draft decision II as it appeared in document E/1998/L.52.

It was so decided.

Participation of non-governmental organizations in the work of the Commission on the Status of Women

The PRESIDENT said he took it that the Council wished to adopt draft decision III as it appeared in document E/1998/L.52.

It was so decided.

Elections, appointments and confirmation (E/1998/97; E/1998/L.1/Add.18-24, E/1998/L.2/Add.3, E/1998/L.53)

Committee for Development Policy

The PRESIDENT said that, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolutions 1998/46 and 1998/47 of 31 July 1998, the Committee for Development Planning had been renamed the Committee for Development Policy. It would be made up of 24 members appointed for three years, all their terms beginning on 1 January 1999. The Council was required to confirm the list of 24 experts nominated by the Secretary-General contained in document E/1998/L.1/Add.22.

Mr. WINNICK (United States of America) expressed surprise that, after long negotiations which had resulted in the termination of the terms of the previous members, nearly two thirds of the names on the new list were those of former members. He wished to know the basic principles and criteria underlying the selection of the new candidates and the types of consultations that had been held with Member States.

Mr. KINNIBURGH (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) explained that the Secretariat had actively endeavoured to identify experts within and outside the Secretariat, and had reviewed at least 60 potential candidatures.

It had been difficult to find candidates because the people approached had been discouraged by the fact that their workload would be heavy and they were reluctant to serve on a pro bono basis. The operating methods of the new Committee had also caused some concern. The topics of its deliberations would not be known before February, and the Committee itself would meet in May and would have to prepare its report by July. The Secretariat had felt that technical skills and continuity were important considerations given the types of responsibilities entrusted to the Committee. The calculation of the new vulnerability index criterion for least developed countries, for example, was a highly technical undertaking. Responding to a question put by the President, he said that women represented about 25 per cent of the candidates nominated. It had been impossible for the Secretariat to find a larger number of women with the technical qualifications required while bearing in mind the need to maintain equitable geographical distribution.

The PRESIDENT said that the Secretary-General should be informed that it would have been preferable to have a balanced representation of the two sexes on the Committee. It was a newly established body and it was a pity that the Secretariat had not seized the opportunity to show that it took into account United Nations resolutions in that field.

Mr. KHAN (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) said that, following a decision taken only the previous summer, the Secretariat had had to ensure that there was not only equitable gender representation, but also that there was a balance of expertise on the matters dealt with by the Committee in order to ensure a better linkage between sustainable development, social development and economic development, as part of an integrated approach, as well as to establish closer ties with the Council. The current phase was a transitional one in the search for that balance.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that it was important to ensure change, rejuvenation and gender balance in the membership of the Committee and that the cited failings in that regard could be attributed to the insufficient time set aside for appointment of members of the Committee, and insufficient details on procedure in the decision establishing that new body. Considering that it was a transition period, the list of the candidates contained in document E/1998/L.1/Add.22 should be elected, on an exceptional basis, for a two-year term to avoid prolonging the imbalance for three years.

Mr. CHOMAR (Mozambique) pointed out that there was no guarantee that it would be possible to redress the imbalances in the Committee's membership upon expiration of the two-year term. If he had understood the representative of Bangladesh correctly, the duration of the term would be set at three years as of 2001.

The PRESIDENT invited delegations to consider the proposal put forward by Bangladesh. Responding to the representative of Mozambique, he confirmed that the term would initially be for two years, then for three years as of 2001. The Secretary-General, in appointing candidates, would thus requested to take into account the principles of change, rejuvenation and gender balance provided that the necessary qualifications were met. The Council was invited to approve the nominations on that basis, and on the understanding that all concerns would be noted.

It was so decided.

Commission on Science and Technology for Development (E/1998/L.1/Add.19)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to consider the election of 33 members of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development for a term beginning on 1 January 1999. In accordance with the provisions contained in document E/1998/L.1/Add.19, eight members must be elected from African States, seven from Asian States, four from Eastern European States, six from Latin American and Caribbean States and eight from Western European and other States. The Group of African States endorsed the nomination of Tunisia, the Group of Asian States endorsed those of China, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Pakistan and the Republic of Korea, the Group of Eastern European States endorsed those of Belarus, Romania, the Russian Federation and Slovakia, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States endorsed those of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Jamaica and Paraguay, and the Group of Western European and other States endorsed those of Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Mr. HIDAYAT (Indonesia) said that his country also wished to propose a candidate for the elections to the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.

The PRESIDENT suggested that where the number of candidates was equal to or less than the number of vacancies, candidates should be elected by acclamation for a term beginning on 1 January 1999, and that the election to

fill vacancies for the Group of African States and the Group of Asian States should be postponed until a later date.

It was so decided.

The candidates proposed by Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, China, Colombia, Cuba, Germania, Greece, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Pakistan, Paraguay, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Romania, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Tunisia, the United Kingdom and the United States were elected by acclamation as members of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development.

The PRESIDENT said that in accordance with the provisions of Council resolution 1998/47, lots should be drawn to stagger the terms of office of the new members of the Commission.

The Council decided the following by the drawing of lots: for the Group of African States, Tunisia would serve for a four-year term; for the Group of Asian States, China, Indonesia, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan would serve for a four-year term and the Republic of Korea for a two-year term; for the Group of Eastern European States, Belarus and Romania would serve for a four-year term and Slovakia and the Russian Federation for a two-year term; for the Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, Bolivia, Colombia and Paraguay would serve for a four-year term and Brazil, Cuba and Jamaica for a two-year term; for the Group of Western European and other States, Belgium, Germany, Greece and Portugal would serve for a four-year term and Austria, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States for a two-year term.

Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to consider the election of 24 experts to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development in the manner described in document E/1998/L.1/Add.18 and taking account of biographical information contained in documents E/1998/L.1/Add.20, 21, 23 and 24. The Council had just received biographical information on two candidates from the Group of African States, namely, Mr. Owen McDonald Kankhulungo of Malawi and Mr. Eddy Kofi Smith of Ghana.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that his country wished to nominate Mr. Ainun Nishat, professor at the University of Technology of Bangladesh and a specialist on water resources.

Mr. ZARIE ZARE (Islamic Republic of Iran) announced that his country

wished to nominate Mr. Ahmad Kahrobaian, professor at the University of Tehran and a former member of the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development.

Ms. NEWELL (Secretary of the Council) reminded members of the Council that the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development was an expert body originating from the merging of the Committee on Natural Resources and the Committee on New and Renewable Sources of Energy and on Energy for Development. In the case of expert bodies, nominations were made on an individual basis and according to established procedure, the Secretariat made biographical information available for each candidate.

The PRESIDENT asked the representatives of the Group of Asian States to confirm that they had no objection to members of their Group submitting nominations of individuals during the meeting. Indeed, according to procedure, it was the Group which should endorse nominations. Even if there was no objection in the given case to the election of nominated candidates, it was best not to depart from established practice since respect for procedure provided a guarantee to all members of the Council, especially in other, more important areas. It was to be hoped that the representatives of Bangladesh and the Islamic Republic of Iran would thus accept the importance of following established procedure. Biographical information on candidates should be made available to members of the Council.

Mr. HANIF (Pakistan), referring to the nominations made by Bangladesh and the Islamic Republic of Iran, said that in order to maintain transparency and cohesion in the Group of Asian States, nominations should be submitted for official endorsement by the Group before being transmitted to the Secretariat.

The PRESIDENT suggested that the Council should proceed to an election on the understanding that the Group of Asian States would, at the next meeting, make known its official position on the nominations submitted during the current meeting.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) pointed out, firstly, that there were two elections on the Council's agenda. In relation to the first, a candidate nominated by Indonesia during the course of the meeting had been elected. In relation to the other, nominations made by Bangladesh and the Islamic Republic of Iran in identical circumstances had been deferred, even though the Islamic Republic of Iran had arranged for biographical information to be distributed to

members of the Council. Visibly, the candidates had not received equal treatment.

Secondly, he reminded the Economic and Social Council that if a Group submitted a number of nominations inferior to the number of seats it had been allocated, and if seats remained vacant as a result, members were perfectly justified in electing individuals who had been spontaneously nominated during the meeting. Such a case had already occurred, and there were no grounds for proceeding otherwise.

The PRESIDENT said that the Secretariat had been following the rule of procedure according to which there was an obligation to submit biographical information on candidates for election to expert bodies. Given that was such the problem with a view to ensuring coherence, he suggested that the Council should proceed to an election, on the understanding that the obligation to submit biographical information was being waived.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that if the problem was not the Group's approval but the submission of biographical information, it was necessary to establish which particular provision of the rules of procedure was applicable in that case.

Ms. NEWELL (Secretary of the Council) said that an expert body comprised individuals who were not elected by virtue of their State of origin, but in their individual capacities. The Council's established practice was to request that such nominations should be accompanied by biographical information.

Mr. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) replied that the qualifications of the Bangladesh expert had been clearly indicated when his nomination had been put forward, and that the Council had been given the opportunity to take note.

The PRESIDENT suggested that in order to resolve the issue while taking account of the opinions of the regional group and of the Secretariat, the Council should elect the list of candidates which he had read out, as well as the candidates from Malawi, Ghana and the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose biographical information had been distributed, and the candidate from Bangladesh, on the basis of the information provided, it being understood that some vacancies could not be filled because of a lack of nominations.

It was so decided.

The candidates submitted by Bangladesh, China, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Finland, France, Ghana, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iceland, Jamaica, Malawi,

Netherlands, Paraguay, Romania, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, the United States of America and Zimbabwe were elected by acclamation to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for Development.

Elections postponed from previous sessions

The PRESIDENT invited the members of the Council to proceed to elections postponed from previous sessions, with a view to filling vacancies in subsidiary bodies.

Programme Coordination Board of the Joint and Co-sponsored Programme on Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to proceed to the election, which had been postponed from previous sessions, of two members of the Group of African States and one member of the Group of Asian States in order to fill vacancies on the Programme Coordination Board for a three-year term beginning on 1 January 1999.

The Group of African States supported the nomination of Gabon and of the United Republic of Tanzania. In the absence of other nominees, those candidates should be elected by acclamation. Since no nomination had been submitted on behalf of the Group of Asian States, that election should be postponed.

It was so decided.

Gabon and the United Republic of Tanzania were elected to the Programme Coordination Board of the Joint and Co-sponsored Programme of Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) by acclamation.

Commission on Sustainable Development

The PRESIDENT said that Finland had informed the Council that it would not be able to serve on the Commission on Sustainable Development after 31 December 1998. The Group of Western European and other States had thus endorsed the nomination of Sweden to complete the term of office of Finland as of 1 January 1999. The Council was invited to elect Sweden by acclamation for the remaining period of Finland's term of office.

It was so decided.

Finland was elected to the Commission on Sustainable Development by acclamation.

Confirmations (E/1998/L.2/Add.3)

The PRESIDENT drew the attention of the Council to document

E/1998/L.2/Add.3 containing the names of representatives of members of functional commissions which had been submitted to the Council for confirmation since the previous session. The Council was invited to confirm the representatives whose names were contained in that document.

It was so decided.

Enlargement of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (E/1998/L.53)

Ms. KELLEY (Secretary of the Council) said that Côte d'Ivoire had sent a note verbale (E/1998/97) to the Council and had submitted a draft decision to the Secretariat (E/1998/L.53) but that insofar as the Council had been unable to consider the draft in informal consultations, it might be preferable to postpone taking a decision until the organizational session in 1999.

The PRESIDENT suggested that the Council should postpone consideration of draft decision E/1998/L.53 until the following session.

It was so decided.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS 50/227 and 52/12 B (A/53/137-E/1998/66, E/1998/61, E/1998/CRP.5)

Mr. FULCI (Italy) said that informal consultations on the theme of the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields had led to the drafting of a resolution contained in document E/1998/L.54, which he hoped would be adopted by the Council. He took the opportunity to welcome the spirit of cooperation which had facilitated the consensus on the draft resolution.

Mr. WINNICK (United States of America) said that draft resolution E/1998/L.54 could have gone much further. After the period of negotiations on General Assembly resolution 50/227, closer links had been taking shape for several years between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions under the leadership of the Economic and Social Council - largely at the initiative of the United States, other members appearing highly sceptical about the involvement of the Organization in the work of the Bretton Woods institutions. In 1998, cooperation had been particularly fruitful, while the financial crisis revealed more than even before the need for the United Nations to address a number of macroeconomic issues on the agenda of the Bretton Woods institutions, and for those institutions to concern themselves with sustainable development and social issues ordinarily falling under the mandate of the United

Nations. It was thus most regrettable that the excellent joint report issued in June 1998 (E/1998/61) had not been reflected more adequately in the draft resolution and that, with the exception of the United States, Council members had appeared reluctant. His delegation hoped that, at the subsequent session, greater progress could be made, given that the various multilateral bodies were under an obligation to integrate their work.

The PRESIDENT said that 1998 had seen an abundance of contacts between the United Nations and the Bretton Woods institutions, testifying to huge avenues for possible cooperation. It was not merely a question of goodwill, however; the international financial crisis could not be resolved merely by creating a new world financial structure; underlying structural problems must also be addressed through an attempt to reconcile the different sensibilities and interests at play. No one institution in the multilateral system could claim to be capable of tackling the issue of social and economic stabilization single-handed and resorting only to its own theories and range of policies. The role of ensuring cooperation had, indeed, been entrusted by the Charter of the United Nations to the Economic and Social Council. Despite such a productive year, however, the Council appeared hesitant to further promote the cause of cooperation. Indeed, the Council had long complained that the Bretton Woods institutions were encroaching upon its territory. The opportunity to coordinate the consideration of issues had arisen and the Bretton Woods institutions had been prepared to lend an ear to the Council; each partner would have been able to consider pressing issues falling under the other's mandate and to find common ground. Regrettably, however, the Council had let that opportunity pass by. It was to be hoped that did not mean that there had been a retreat to earlier positions, but, rather, that the Council would resume the dialogue to which it was bound by its mandate.

SOCIAL AND HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS (E/1998/L.52)

The PRESIDENT drew the attention of the Council to draft decision IV in document E/1998/L.52 entitled "Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights", which the Council was invited to adopt.

Draft decision IV contained in document E/1998/L.52 was adopted.

The PRESIDENT declared the substantive session of 1998 of the Economic and Social Council closed.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.